

[By Stephanie Peters, Rutland Herald](#)

The final donors at the Gift-of-Life Marathon, along with the drive's volunteers and staff, paced the Paramount Theatre in nervous anticipation for nearly an hour after the last pint of blood was collected Tuesday evening.

Did they reach the New England record-setting goal of 1,000 pints collected that was dreamt up by drive sponsors Central Vermont Public Service and WJJR?

Not long after 9 p.m. came the news – the final tally was exactly 1,000 pints. The room erupted in cheers and bear hugs.

"Unbelievable!" said Amor Ostojic, the American Red Cross's account representative overseeing the blood drive for the day. "Boy, I grew four or 500 gray hairs in the last few minutes."

Receiving extra hugs and attention was Steve Costello, not only the blood drive's main booster and spokesman for Central Vermont Public Service, but the final blood donor of the night. Red Cross staff congratulated him on pushing the total over the top.

After the initial roar died down came a second announcement.

The final pint count wasn't 1,000, but 1,024.

The Rutland community on Tuesday shattered the previous single-day New England record set at the Paramount last December, reaching a goal that Costello, Ostojic and WJJR's Terry Jaye last month readily admitted was "crazy."

"I'm actually shocked that we got 1,024," Costello said. "I thought it would be cool to put a really big number out there as a goal and Rutland continues to blow me away."

Around 10 p.m., Costello and Mayor Christopher Louras received mohawk haircuts at the theater courtesy of the Mazzariellos of Star Barber – keeping their end of a bargain they announced last week as a challenge to the community.

Costello joked as he received his haircut that next year they'd set the goal at 2,000 to avoid what's becoming a haircut tradition.

Donors filed steadily through the theater throughout the day with shorter wait times than in years past, in large part due to the addition of 40 Red Cross staff from Manchester, N.H., who arrived downtown in two premier buses around 9 a.m. For the first time, the drive also offered eligible donors the option of making a double-red cell donation; although the Red Cross had hoped for about 80 double-red cell donations they had 53 and collected 106 usable pints.

As is tradition, the first person in line to start the drive at 10:30 a.m. was Nanci Gordon, co-morning host at WJJR. The first person to make it onto a cot on the Paramount stage was Jamie Leonard, a crew scheduler for CVPS and a frequent donor. They sat next to each other on the stage.

"The thing that amazes me is how enthusiastic people are," said Gordon. "We could do it. I think it will be close one way or the other."

Rutland County Sen. William Carris and U.S. Rep. Peter Welch were two of the other early arrivals at the theater. While Carris was able to donate, Welch was turned away due to his travel last month to Pakistan, a malaria region. Anyone who has traveled to one of the countries on the Red Cross's watch list must wait a year before donating, Welch said he was told.

"I'm disappointed," Welch said as he watched the drive from the theater's balcony. "Partly

because when you get here and you see you can be one link in the chain, you want to be a part of it."

Welch said he was also impressed by Rutland's spirit.

"Rutland's faced some real challenges recently, the wind storm, the flooding, unemployment rates, yet you've got here a community spirit that won't die."

Adding another element to this year's event was a documentary film crew from New York City, Great Jones Productions, which has worked with CVPS in the past. Director and producer Art Jones said he was intrigued by the message of hope in the event. He said he hopes to shop the film to PBS or the Sundance Channel.

"I think Rutland has a lot to say to the rest of the country in the spirit and action of what's happening here today," he said.